

Policy on the use of Reader Pens in School National Examinations

1. Rationale

The use of assistive technology devices when sitting for examinations is a positive move aimed for students to take exams independently. The use of the reading pen can be considered as one of various assistive technology devices that may be used during examinations where, by simply running the pen across printed questions, students can instantly hear them read aloud. The use of this device means students who have reading difficulties, such as dyslexia, can independently take exams knowing they can easily access written material thus facilitating the understanding of text.

The use of reader pens in examinations supports students and stakeholders in the following ways:

- Reduces exam anxiety and boosts self-confidence;
- Promotes inclusivity amongst peers;
- Supports multiple languages (albeit not Maltese);
- Improves student attainment;
- Promotes independence;
- Saves schools the need of human resources to act as examination assistants, as human Readers are not needed for students using the reader pen.

2. Eligibility

2.1. Primary School students

Primary school students will be allowed the use of a reader pen if:

- a) recommended by an Educational Psychologist/Dyslexia Specialist in the report following assessment.
- b) the class teacher/subject teacher can provide written confirmation (endorsed by the Head of School) that the student is well accustomed in using a reader pen in the normal classroom situation and will therefore be able to use it confidently and profitably for the purposes of school national examinations.

Moreover, should there be reference to a Reader but no reference to a reader pen in the specialist's report, schools must contact the Educational Assessment Unit (EAU) with the required confirmation from school administration indicating that the student is able to use the reader pen confidently and would benefit from its use during school-based and national exams.

2.2. Middle School students

Middle School students will be allowed the use of a reader pen if:

- a) recommended by an Educational Psychologist/Dyslexia Specialist in the report following assessment.
- b) the subject teacher can provide written confirmation (endorsed by the Head of School) that the student is well accustomed to use the reader pen in a classroom situation and will therefore be able to use it confidently and profitably for the purposes of national school examinations.

The final decision as to whether a student should have a human reader or reader pen is that of the student, subject teacher/s and parent. Once a decision is taken, the school administration needs to be informed accordingly for logistical purposes.

Moreover, should there be reference to a Reader but no reference to a Reader pen in the specialist's report, schools must contact the EAU with the required written confirmation from school administration indicating that the student is able to use the reader pen confidently and would benefit from its use during school-based and national exams.

2.3. Secondary School students

Students with special educational needs who would have been assessed by an Educational Psychologist/ Dyslexia Specialist (from January of Year 8 onwards) will have the ACCESS-Disability Support Committee (ADSC) approved statement in Year 9. The approved access arrangements indicated on the students' individual ADSC document can be used in the case of national examinations, as well as during school-based assessments throughout Years 9 to 11.

Schools will need to set their internal deadlines by when students will be required to indicate their choice to the School Leadership Team on whether they will be needing a Human Reader or using a Reader pen.

Students are only allowed to use the reader pen in national school examinations, if the school administration could confirm that the student is confident in using the reader pen across different curricular subjects, and consequently this has become his/her normal mode of working.

3. Role of School Administration

Schools are to seek authorisation from the EAU for students in Primary and Middle schools to use reader pens during annual national examinations. This is to be done by sending an email request to EAU@ilearn.edu.mt attaching a scanned copy of the specialist's report which recommends the use of a reader pen in the learning

process of the student, together with a confirmation from the school administration that this has become a student's normal mode of working.

School personnel are to ensure that the student has developed competence in its use, when applying for such permission.

Requests are to be sent at least **three months** before the examination session.

4. Procedural measures

4.1. Permissible pens

The reader pen to be used during examinations should not have any in-built dictionary, thesaurus, or data storage facility.

If the pen has these functions, then it is necessary to ensure that the pen has an Exam Lock and for the pen to be locked on exam mode, so that these facilities are not accessed during the examinations.

All pens must be checked by a member of the SLT before the examination to ensure they comply with these requirements.

4.2. Examination subjects

A reader pen is allowed in all non-language subjects. In language subjects a reader pen is allowed however, the certificate will be endorsed (that is, it will be stated that a reader pen was used).

4.3. Before the examination

Students must ensure the following:

- Reader pen is fully charged.
- Reader pen is set to the right- or left-handed (as appropriate).
- Reader pen is set on the longest Auto Shut Down option. This promotes focus on the examination.
- The Mode should be set to Append, so that the pen will append each text line after the previous one to build up full sentences or paragraphs.

4.4. During the examination

- Students using the reader pen can be with their peers in the same examination room.

- Students using the pen are to bring their own earphones/headphones to use with the reader pen so as not to disturb other students taking the examination.
- It is the duty of the student to ensure that the reader pen is fully charged before the examination. During the examination, charging the reader pen is not permissible.

5. Student Malpractice

5.1. In the case a student does not bring the earphones to connect to the reader pen during an examination

In such a situation, the school is not obliged to accommodate the students in a separate room. However, if the school can find an alternative arrangement and accommodate the students in a suitable area where they can use the device without disturbing other students, then this can be resorted to.

If the school cannot provide a separate physical space nor the human resources needed to supervise the student, then the student would not be allowed to use the reader pen.

5.2. In the case of a student caught using non-permissible reader pen functions during an examination

The invigilator is to retrieve the reader pen from the student and leave it in a safe place, whilst the student is asked to continue the examination.

The invigilator is to immediately inform the SLT about this. The invigilator will ask the corridor supervisor to call a member of the SLT to the examination room and the invigilator is to explain what happened passing over the evidence retrieved.

The SLT member should write a short report, stating the facts: date; time; subject of examination; invigilator's name; invigilator's statement of what happened; and the evidence. The Head of School should be notified immediately.

Once the student finishes the examination, s/he is to be accompanied to the Head's office. In the meantime, the Head of School is to contact the student's parents/guardians and inform them that their son/daughter was caught using non-permissible functions of the reader pen during the examination and therefore a zero (0) mark will be given.

6. Disclaimer

Students are to use their reader pens (preferably the one used during their learning process) as the EAU does not provide reader pens.

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January 2022